

PRESENTATION OF THE ACADEMY
PLAQUE TO JEROME P. WEBSTER, M.D.*

GEORGE H. HUMPHREYS II, M.D.

Emeritus Professor of Surgery
Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons
New York, N.Y.

THIS year the Academy Plaque is awarded to Dr. Jerome P. Webster. I feel especially pleased and privileged to tell you about him, since he has been my admired teacher, colleague, and friend for more than 40 years.

Born in Ashland, N. H., in August 1888, the son of a minister who was headmaster of the Holderness School, he was graduated from that school in 1906. His scholarly interest in history and literature, then begun, has been a lifelong devotion. After graduation from Trinity College at Hartford in 1910, he entered the Johns Hopkins Medical School. Following graduation he was appointed surgical intern and assistant resident at Johns Hopkins from 1914 to 1916. Then he became a special assistant to our ambassador in Germany. When the United States entered the war in 1917, he was commissioned first lieutenant in the Medical Corps and served three years on three fronts in France. He was decorated by the British, received the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star from the French, and was cited for bravery in the American sector.

In 1921, after another year of residency at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, he went to China as the first surgical resident of the new Peking Union Medical College. For five years he taught in Peking, rising to associate professor and forming many lifelong associations. Then, after visiting plastic surgeons in Europe and England and spending six months in St. Louis, he joined Dr. Allen O. Whipple's staff at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center when that institution opened in 1928. There he established, in 1930, one of the first residency-training programs in plastic surgery in this country. For the next 24 years, until his retirement as professor emeritus of clinical surgery in 1954,

*Presented at the Annual Meeting of the New York Academy of Medicine, April 12, 1973.



JEROME P. WEBSTER, M.D.

he attracted and trained an outstanding group of men, who have carried his ideals abroad, and maintained at the Medical Center the service whose standards he first set 43 years ago.

It is not, however, for his outstanding contributions to plastic surgery that we now honor Dr. Webster. Neither his record as a founding member of the Board of Plastic Surgery, his leadership in more than twenty surgical societies, nor his many original papers, written over a period of 30 years, are relevant to this award. His surgical awards, medals, honorary degrees, trusteeships, and honorary membership in many scholarly societies are testimony to services other than those we honor.

Nor is this award related to the fact that he was twice decorated by the government of Greece during World War II, and three times by the Republic of China. Distinguished as this record is, it is equalled by the scholarly and literary contributions for which the Academy has chosen to honor him.

Dr. Webster was elected to fellowship in 1932, sponsored by Dr. Whipple, Dr. Fordyce B. St. John, and Dr. Archibald Malloch. He became secretary of the Section on Historical and Cultural Medicine the next year and from 1935 to 1937 he was its chairman. He then became a member of the Editorial Board of the *Bulletin*, served for 20 years, and was its chairman in 1957 and 1958. He was a member of the Library Committee from 1941 to 1944 and of the Friends of the Rare Book Room from 1954 to 1960, serving as president the last two years. A vice president of the Academy from 1953 to 1956 and trustee from 1957 to 1961, he also served on the Building Committee during the latter period. A discriminating bibliophile, he has assembled not only a fine personal historical library, but also a uniquely complete library of plastic surgery at the Medical Center that earned him a special award by the Columbia Libraries in 1971. The skill and knowledge that has enabled him to do this, has always, through his activities here, been available to the Academy.

Few doctors have had as wide an influence, or as broad and varied interests as has Dr. Webster. It has been fortunate for us at the Medical Center that his principal center of activity has been there, and the Academy also has been fortunate in being able to count on his continuing interest and service ever since his election 41 years ago. In grateful acknowledgement, the Academy's plaque is awarded.